a strange and puzzling statement

Masaaki Sasaki

At the beginning of Genesis chapter 6 there is a strange and puzzling statement, serving almost as a prelude to the story of Noah's Flood. Verse 2 says: *"The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they took wives for themselves from among them."*

Two main interpretations have usually been proposed. First, that the "sons of God" were angels, and the "daughters of men" were human women. Second, that the "sons of God" were descendants of Seth, thought to be righteous, while the "daughters of men" were descendants of Cain, steeped in wickedness. Yet both views face difficulties. How could angels, who have no physical bodies, bear children with women? And Seth's descendants, though relatively righteous, were still sinners like Cain's descendants.

As a rather unconventional pastor, I long suspected that this text hinted at some profound reality lost to us. Long ago in a Bible college classroom, when this came up for discussion, I proposed a "third view"—that this referred to intermarriage between Homo sapiens and Neanderthals. My classmates laughed, but years later genetic research confirmed that modern humans do in fact carry 2–4% Neanderthal DNA. Later, Denisovan DNA was also discovered in us. Thus the possibility of ancient interbreeding became scientific fact.

The Bible was written more than three thousand years ago, for readers with no modern scientific understanding. So its accounts are often simplified, told in story form, focused only on what related to God's plan of salvation. That is why ammonites, dinosaurs, mammoths, and the Big Bang are absent—they are irrelevant to salvation history.

Genesis 6, however, uniquely mentions "the daughters of men." Perhaps, I imagined, this refers to humans outside the line God had chosen for salvation — ancient hominins other than Homo sapiens. While Scripture provides no doctrinal basis, imagination allows us to explore. Genomic research today reveals immense detail,

even reconstructing ancient eye, hair, and skin colors. Such knowledge fuels creative theological wandering.

Thus, the "sons of God"—Homo sapiens chosen for God's salvation plan—intermarried with other ancient humans, introducing grave complications. Biologically close species can produce hybrids: lions and leopards yield leopons, horses and donkeys yield mules, monkeys of different species sometimes reproduce fertile offspring. Even fish bred by humans, like the "Kindai" cross between seabream species, illustrate this. The offspring of Genesis 6 were called *Nephilim*, giants of strength—perhaps evidence of genetic anomalies from such unions.

I had long suspected contact with Neanderthals, so when genetic confirmation came, I rejoiced inwardly. Modern humans arose some 60–70,000 years ago while Neanderthals still lived. Scripture, through humanized language, portrays God as "regretting" these unions. In reality, God foresaw them. Yet the result threatened to corrupt humanity's identity as created in God's image. Therefore God preserved only Noah and his family, who still bore that image, while giving others opportunity to repent before judgment fell.

Still, traces of Neanderthal and Denisovan DNA remained, even in Noah's descendants. Later traditions of giants, like those reported in Numbers 13 or embodied in Goliath, may reflect these memories. Genetics can sometimes resurface traits after many generations.

Some theologians connect 1 Peter 3:18–20, where Christ is said to have preached to the spirits in prison, with those destroyed in the Flood. I am not a universalist, but I also reject the harsh teaching that all unbelievers burn eternally. Each will stand before God for judgment according to their deeds. Those who trusted God will be saved through Christ's atonement.

Thus, I do not see in Peter's words a "second chance" after death, but perhaps Christ spoke to those ancient souls, explaining what had happened. This, too, is speculation, not doctrine. Imagination must remain imagination, though it may enrich theological reflection.

Finally, we must remember: Scripture conveys divine truth in human language, with all its limitations. God spoke in Hebrew to people of limited vocabulary and

understanding. We must use imagination carefully, to aid understanding, but also leave unspoken what Scripture leaves unspoken. Faith remains grounded not in speculation, but in God’s saving work.